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AUTHOR Bowring, Malcolm
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ABSTRACT

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) was introduced in 1991 in the United Kingdom to provide a single common format to summarize individuals' achievements and experiences in both education and their adult lives. A study examined the use of the NRA within a general adult education context. The heads of 6 adult education centers in 1 Welsh local education authority and 15 tutors participated in a series of meetings to identify issues in recording the achievements of adult learners and to develop practical implementation strategies. Learners given the NRA were impressed and pleased with it. Twelve issues relating to recording achievement and the NRA were identified along with 10 key elements of recording achievement for adult learners. Among other things, it was concluded that recording achievement should be an entitlement for adults, they should have ownership of the process of recording achievement, adult learners and tutors should be clear about the purposes of recording achievement and their roles in the process, learners should be provided with course outlines and learning objectives, and centers' processes of recording achievement should be accredited by an external body to secure the NRA's credibility and status. (Appended are introductory information concerning the NRA and guidelines for completing it.) (MN)

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Welsh Joint Education Committee Cyd-Bwyllgor Addysg Cymru

Records of Achievement

for

Adult Learners

Project Report

Malcolm Bowring

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an introduction for adult learners	

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Aberbargoed Adult Education Centre
Abercynon Community Education Centre
Bedwas Community College
Bridgend Adult Education Centre
Cynnfig Community Education Centre
Heolddu Adult Education Centre

Records of Achievement for Adult Learners

Report of a project undertaken by the WJEC
and funded by Mid Glamorgan TEC
April 1992 - March 1993

Introduction and background

Over recent years there has been a growing demand from adults, and from those providing educational services to adults, that adult learning should be given appropriate recognition. There is an increasing realisation of the need for a system which is flexible and relevant to meet the requirements and aspirations of adult learners who have a diverse range of motivations and ambitions. For many adult learners, existing means of accrediting learning, e.g. NVQ, GCSE, AS and A levels, may not be appropriate for their needs and circumstances at a particular time. For them, as well as for those following accredited courses, learning should be managed in ways which will support, motivate and encourage individuals, build on prior learning and experiences and recognise and acknowledge a wide range of achievements. Formal qualifications do not encompass all that it is important for a person to learn: they do not represent all the varied skills, abilities and personal qualities which any one individual may possess.

At the same time there is also an increasing recognition of the need to place greater emphasis on the quality of the learning experience together with a desire to promote a commitment in individuals to life-long learning.

Records of achievement (RoA) and the process of recording achievement are acknowledged as a means of managing and accrediting learning in ways which can meet the needs of adult learners. It is recognised that to be effective in promoting learning and personal development, the process of recording achievement should be underpinned by principles which place emphasis on:

* the wide range of an individual's achievements and experiences;
* the involvement of the individual in the collection and recording of evidence of achievement and experiences;

* clarifying with individuals their learning programmes and the intended outcomes of learning;
* reviewing progress with individuals and helping them to set their own learning targets;
* preparing a summary document to help individuals to recognise what they have achieved and to explain their achievements to others.

In recent years, considerable experience has been gained in schools and colleges in developing and implementing systems of recording achievement and RoA which are based on these principles. In 1991, the Government introduced the National Record of Achievement (NRA) to provide a single common format to summarise the achievements and experiences of an individual both in education and adult life. The ultimate aim is to produce one single system of recording achievement throughout life. The NRA contains the following sections: personal details; school achievements; other achievements and experiences; qualifications and credits; employment history; personal statement. It was made mandatory for all school leavers from 1993, thus ensuring that in future years everyone should possess a NRA. It is intended that individuals should replace and update the contents of their NRAs as they progress through education, training and employment. The NRA is used with trainees on TEC programmes and is being piloted in higher education and employment. Thus there will be an increasing awareness amongst adult learners of the NRA and of the purposes and value of the processes of recording achievement. Indeed, they may come to expect support from providers of adult learning to review and record their achievements and to plan for the future.

Project aim

The aim of the project was to explore how the principles of recording achievement and the NRA could be applied within a general adult education context.

Objectives

The project's objectives were to:

(i) identify the key elements necessary for the application of the principles of recording achievement to general adult education practice;

(ii) provide training and support for adult educators in order that they could successfully implement the process of recording achievement;

(iii) provide an identified cohort of students with a NRA statement;

(iv) establish criteria for quality control purposes.

Overview

Heads of adult centres were approached through the LEA to seek their support and involvement in the project. They were asked to put forward the names of tutors in a range of subjects, including modern foreign languages, business studies and craft, who would be interested in taking part. As a result, a total of fifteen tutors in six centres agreed to participate. In the main, the courses involved did not lead to external accreditation; most of the adults attended for personal, social and recreational reasons.

A series of meetings with heads of centres and tutors was held throughout the project. The purposes of these meetings were to raise awareness; establish a common understanding of the principles of recording achievement; identify issues; provide feedback and develop practical strategies for implementation.

During the project, tutors were involved in:

(i) clarifying to students the purposes of recording achievement and the NRA;

(ii) providing students with clear learning goals;

(iii) involving students in

- identifying learning needs
- planning learning strategies
- reviewing progress
- identifying achievements
- setting learning targets;

(iv) supporting students in completing the NRA;

(v) contributing to the project by

- identifying issues
- developing practice
- gathering students' reactions
- evaluating outcomes.

Programme

Summer term 1992

Centres and tutors to be involved in the project were identified and contacted.

Autumn term 1992

Introductory meeting held with heads of centres.

Introductory meeting held with tutors.

Meetings with tutors and heads of centres held to identify issues and consider strategies.

Centres visited to discuss progress.

Tutors introduced recording achievement and the NRA to students.

Tutors produced course aims and objectives listing the skills, knowledge and understanding students could acquire during the course.

Tutors implemented the process of recording achievement with students.

Spring term 1993

Meetings of tutors and heads of centres held to review progress, evaluate outcomes and consider future developments.

Centres visited to discuss progress.

Tutors implemented the process of recording achievement with students.

NRA format adapted to meet the needs of adult learners.

Tutors supported students in completing the NRA.

Project experience

The initial phase of the project concentrated on the development of tutors' awareness and understanding of the process of recording achievement and its purposes. Tutors who were teachers in schools were familiar with records of achievement but for others, working in other employment, the concept was relatively new. Preliminary discussions revealed that the philosophy of recording achievement fitted in with the informal, student - centred approach to learning found in many adult learners' classes. For example, some tutors created opportunities for students to identify learning objectives, encouraged discussion and feedback about progress and helped students to set learning targets. Prior to participation in the project, a number of the tutors had produced descriptions of their courses often including

learning objectives. These were adapted by tutors so that they could be more readily shared with students.

In the early stages of the project, considerable discussion took place at meetings of tutors concerning the best ways of presenting the idea of records of achievement to students. It was decided that introductions for students should place emphasis on entitlement to recording achievement and the NRA, supporting learning, accrediting prior learning and voluntary participation. One of the initial concerns of tutors was that recording should not be intrusive and that it should be appropriate for adult learners. It should not be onerous or time-consuming but should be easy to understand, flexible, supportive and involve the students.

Following the introduction given by tutors, a number of students in each class agreed to participate in the project. Those involved varied considerably in terms of age, educational background and employment. For most, recording achievement was a new concept although some had seen records of achievement which had been presented by schools to their children, grand children, other relatives and friends.

During the project, tutors developed ways of recording achievement to fit in with their teaching methods and programmes. Records sheets and diaries were used by students to record their progress and achievements. Sometimes these were taken home and completed before the next session. They were found useful by both students and tutors as starting points for discussing progress and activities. As the project proceeded, positive feedback was received from tutors and students in all subject areas. Recording achievement had supported tutors in structuring learning and identifying needs whilst retaining the freedom for students to choose and negotiate the way they wish to work and still allowing for enjoyment and personal development. Students had welcomed the opportunity to clarify learning objectives, monitor their own progress and identify their achievements. It had also helped them to discuss more clearly their progress and learning targets with the tutor. Initial reservations expressed by some tutors about the purposes and practicalities of the initiative gave way to increasing confidence and recognition of the value of the process.

Inevitably greater progress was made when there was an early commitment to and understanding of the principles of recording achievement. By the end of the project, it was clear that students in all subjects had responded positively, both to the process of recording

achievement and to the NRA. This in turn enhanced the value of the scheme in the eyes of tutors. It was recognised by tutors that there would be considerable benefit in building on the experience gained in the project to further develop and refine approaches to recording achievement.

Students who were provided with the NRA were impressed and pleased with the folder and its contents. At one centre, an informal ceremony was arranged for students to be presented with their NRAs. The occasion provided an opportunity to acknowledge students achievements and formed a fitting ending to the courses involved.

Issues identified

During the project, a number of issues relating to recording achievement and the NRA were identified. In the limited time of the project it was possible to explore some of these in greater detail than others. Ways in which some of these issues were addressed within the project are reflected in the final section of this report concerning the key elements of recording achievement for adult learners. The issues identified were:

1. What were the purposes of recording achievement for adult learner?
2. What were the purposes of the NRA?
3. What principles should underpin the process of recording achievement?
4. How could the process of recording achievement be developed to meet the needs of adult learners?
5. How suitable was the NRA for adult learners?
6. What guidance on completing the NRA could be provided to support adult learners?
7. How could the process of recording achievement be an integral part of learning?
8. What support would adult learners need in completing the NRA?
9. How could students be involved in the process of recording achievement?
10. How could learning be managed to provide opportunities for students to review and record their progress and achievements?
11. What were the implications for centres of introducing the NRA in terms of management and resources?
12. How could the quality of the NRA be assured?

Key elements of recording achievement for adult learners

The project had as its main objective the identification of the elements necessary for the application of the principles of recording achievement to general adult education practice.

The key elements identified were that:

* recording achievement should be an entitlement for adult learners;
* the process of recording achievement should be appropriate to the needs of adult learners;
* adult learners should have ownership of the process of recording achievement;
* adult learners should be made aware of the support they can expect from their tutors and the centre in recording their achievements;
* adult learners and tutors should be clear about the purposes of recording achievement;
* adult learners and tutors should be clear about their roles in relation to recording achievement;
* adult learners should be provided with course outlines and learning objectives;
* centres should formulate a written policy for recording achievement based on agreed principles;
* tutors should have appropriate guidance and support to enable them to effectively introduce and implement the process of recording achievement;
* centres' processes of recording achievement should be accredited by an external body to secure the credibility and status of the RoA/NRA.

Recording achievement should be an entitlement for adult learners

Adult learners should be entitled to have the opportunity to:

* discuss their progress and achievements with their tutors;
* collect and record evidence of achievement;
* plan for future learning needs;
* summarise their achievements in a record of achievement.

Adult learners are increasingly likely to expect this entitlement as a result of their experiences of recording achievement in schools and colleges, and also because of the introduction of the NRA. The Government's aim is to produce one common system of recording achievement

throughout life. The NRA is seen as a means of promoting a commitment to life-long learning by encouraging learning styles which depend upon the review and recording of achievement and upon continuous planning for the future.

The process of recording achievement should be appropriate to the needs of adult learners

Adult learners have a wide range of needs and aspirations. While some may be concerned to gain qualifications to help them in employment, others may be interested in self-improvement to gain or develop additional skills and abilities. Many will be following courses to help them with their interests and hobbies. Often they join classes for company and friendship and prefer a stress-free environment in which to learn. It should also be remembered that many adult learners pay fees for their courses and expect to be given value for money. They are unlikely to appreciate activities which seem to be unrelated to their reasons for taking a particular course. To meet this wide range of adult learners' needs, the process of recording achievement should be flexible, user-friendly and designed for the particular individuals concerned. Recording and reviewing should be an integral part of teaching and learning rather than a bolt-on extra. In this way the recording achievement process is seen as supporting learning rather than reducing teaching time.

Encouraging students to record their progress and achievements in their own time is of value in that it not only saves class time but also provides them with a useful opportunity to reflect on their own progress.

Recording formats which are straightforward and easy to use are needed which are appropriate for the students and the particular course. Towards the end of the course, students may be encouraged to complete or update their records of achievement. If the NRA formats are used (see example of a modified version in Annex A), students can also be provided with a Course Achievements page on which they can record activities undertaken, experiences gained, work completed, items produced, skills learned, etc.

Adult learners should have ownership of the process of recording achievement

The value of recording achievement can be realised where learners are fully involved in the process and are able to decide what should be recorded. Sometimes adults may wish to join courses which are uncertificated because they prefer not to be assessed in a formal way. They may feel that assessment would create unwanted stress and detract from the enjoyment of the course, or they may see little value for themselves in gaining a qualification. Recording achievement provides a means of recognising progress which these individuals may find acceptable and indeed may welcome as a means of seeing what they have learned. It may also help them to feel pleased with their progress, thereby motivating them to learn and increasing their confidence and self-esteem.

Adult learners should be made aware of the support they can expect from their tutors and the centre in recording their achievements

If adult learners are to make the most of the opportunities on offer, they should be provided before enrolment with information which makes clear to them the support they can expect from the centre and from the tutor in recording their achievements. The centre's prospectus might, for example, contain the following information:

> As a student following a course in this centre, you are entitled to a record of achievement in which can be recorded the skills and knowledge acquired, experiences gained, items made, activities carried out, etc. At the beginning of the course, your tutor will explain how you can record your achievements. During the course, your tutor will help you to recognise and record your achievements. The tutor will also explain what you need to do next to meet your personal learning targets. At the end of the course, your tutor will help you to produce your record of achievement. If you wish, this can include updating or recording your achievements and experiences in education, employment and adult life in general.

Adult learners and tutors should be clear about the purposes of recording achievement

To provide appropriate ways of recording achievement to meet the needs of adult learners, it is necessary that both students and tutors are clear about the purposes of recording achievement.

Within the project the following purposes were identified:

Purposes for students

To recognise and value achievements.

To increase motivation, self-confidence and self-esteem.

To identify and appreciate progress.

To record prior achievements.

To collect evidence of achievements.

To maintain a record of achievement.

To provide others with a record of personal achievement.

Purposes for centres and tutors

To support students' learning by reviewing and recording progress so that individual learning needs can be met.

To clarify for students their learning programmes and objectives.

To accredit the wide range of students' achievements in courses including those leading to formal qualifications, e.g. GCSE, BTEC.

To increase students' satisfaction with their courses.

To promote the centre and its courses to adults.

Adult learners and their tutors should be clear about their roles in relation to recording achievement

Both tutors and adult learners should be provided with appropriate guidance concerning their roles in recording achievement. Heads of centres should brief tutors before courses start and concise written guidance provided for tutors and students (see example in Annex B).

At the beginning of a course, tutors should introduce the concept and purposes of recording

achievement and the entitlement of students to support throughout the course. It may be better to limit the amount of detail given at this stage so that students are introduced gradually to the process as part of normal course activities.

It can be useful if students are encouraged to keep a diary in which they make brief notes often at the end of each session about, for example:

(i) what they understood/did well;

(ii) what they did not understand/do well;

(iii) what they need to do before the next session;

(iv) what they need to do at the next session.

At the beginning of the course, the tutor should provide students with the course outline and learning objectives. This will give students a context, framework and vocabulary to support them in following their progress and recording their achievements.

During the course, students can be encouraged to discuss their progress and achievements with the tutor and to record these in their diaries. Any assessments made by the tutor of students' work can also be discussed with the individuals concerned in order to identify strengths, weaknesses and plan the next steps.

Students can be encouraged to collect and keep evidence of their course achievements, e.g. paintings, drawings, pieces of written work, artefacts, photographs, tape and video recordings. They can also be invited to record when they believe they have mastered a certain skill, understood a particular concept, made significant progress, etc., and to discuss the relevant evidence with the tutor. This information may be kept by the student so that a portfolio of evidence is built up during the course.

Towards the end of the course, tutors should support students in preparing a course summary statement of achievement which can be validated and signed by the tutor. Students can also be encouraged and supported in updating or producing either a record of achievement in their own files or folders, or the NRA. Written guidance can be provided to help students in producing their RoA/NRA (see example in Annex A).

Adult learners should be provided with course outlines and learning objectives

The value of centres providing information about the content and nature of courses on offer is that adults are better able to make informed choices and tutors know that students in their classes are clear about what the course has to offer. An additional benefit to both students and tutors is that it facilitates more meaningful negotiations between the two parties concerning the provision of learning programmes appropriate to individual needs.

Course descriptions can provide an outline of the content of the course and how it will be taught.

Learning objectives should clarify for students the planned learning outcomes of the course and should be described in terms of the knowledge, understanding and skills which the student can acquire during the course. They provide a focus for discussion between student and tutor, assist students in judging their own progress and help them in articulating and recording their achievements. Unplanned learning outcomes can also be identified, discussed and recorded.

Students should be provided with course outlines and learning objectives at the beginning of their courses. Learning objectives can be presented in the form of a check-list which students can use during the course to record evidence of achievement in relation to the objectives.

Centres should formulate a written policy for recording achievement based on agreed principles

A written policy should clarify for students and tutors the purposes and principles of recording achievement in the centre. It should also make clear who is involved, what needs to be done and when, as well as arrangements for reviewing the policy.

In drawing up the policy, all tutors in the centre should be involved. Agreement should be reached on the principles underpinning the process of recording achievement in the centre. The following principles are offered as a starting point for discussion.

The process of recording achievement should:

(i) acknowledge the wide range of an individual's achievements and experiences;

(ii) involve the individual in the collection and recording of evidence of the range of his/her achievements and experiences;

(iii) clarify for individuals their learning programmes and objectives;

(iv) involve individuals and their tutors in discussion to review progress, set targets and plan learning;

(v) enable individuals to prepare a summary document in which they can record their achievements and experiences.

Tutors should have appropriate guidance and support to enable them to effectively introduce and implement the process of recording achievement

Guidance and support for tutors will be a key factor in securing the effective introduction and implementation of recording achievement and will be important in gaining the necessary commitment of tutors. At the outset it is vital for tutors to gain an understanding of the purposes and the principles underpinning the process of recording achievement. Particular attention should be paid to the distinction between the purpose of the process and the purpose of the record of achievement. The former is concerned principally with supporting learning and personal development, while the latter provides recognition of the individual's learning and achievement. Discussion should aim to clarify the purposes so that tutors have a sound foundation on which to base consideration of more practical matters. It is worth remembering that time spent discussing the purposes and principles is likely to be as helpful to tutors as specific guidance on practical matters relating to implementation.

During the first year of implementation, it will be particularly important for heads of centres to discuss with tutors and students the development and progress of the scheme, and to offer guidance and support. At the end of the year, the scheme should be evaluated and the centre's policy reviewed in the light of feedback from tutors and students. In subsequent years, heads of centres should continue to provide support and guidance for tutors as well as monitor and evaluate the scheme to ensure that quality is maintained.

Centres' processes of recording achievement should be accredited by an external body to secure the credibility and status of the RoA/NRA

The quality of the record of achievement depends to a considerable extent on the quality of the support given to students in recording their achievements. For example, in the case of the 'Course Achievements' and 'Achievements and Experiences' sections of the record of achievement, students are unlikely to do justice to themselves unless they have been involved in the process of discussing their progress and achievements with their tutors and being supported and encouraged to record their successes and collect evidence of achievement.

The quality of the process should be maintained by the head of centre and tutors. The level of quality control in the centre can be assured for users of the RoA/NRA if the centre's processes meet standards set by an external accrediting agency. The value of accreditation depends on the extent to which the accrediting agency is seen to be expert and independent.

Centres seeking accreditation should demonstrate commitment to the principles underlying records of achievement and meet specified criteria relating both to the process of recording achievement and to the records of achievement themselves. To gain accreditation the centre would need to provide evidence that it is meeting the criteria and, if accredited, would be subject to regular monitoring to ensure that the criteria continue to be met.

The criteria which centres would be expected to meet are:

* all students should be entitled to support from the centre in recording their achievements;
* all tutors in the centre should provide support for students in recording their achievements;
* learning programmes and planned learning outcomes should be provided for students;
* students should be entitled to discuss their progress and achievements with their tutors and plan the next steps in learning;
* the centre should have a written policy based on the principles of recording achievement which should include arrangements for monitoring and evaluation;

* students should be entitled to support from tutors in preparing their records of achievement;
* students should be entitled to support in preparing a statement of course achievements based on a process of discussion between the student and tutor and on evidence compiled during the course.

NRA Presentation Evening
Cynnfig Community Education Centre

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COMPLETING THE NATIONAL RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT

Guidance for Adult Learners

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) is a summary of achievements and experiences gained in education, employment and adult life. It can help in the recognition of personal achievements, in planning future learning and in applications for training or employment. The NRA includes the following sections which may be used as appropriate:

Personal Details

A list of secondary schools and colleges attended can be included in the space provided.

Course Achievements

This section can be completed after discussion with the course tutor. It can include what has been achieved during the course, e.g. what has been learned, what skills have been acquired, what has been made.

Evidence of Achievement

Actual examples of achievements can be included, e.g. pieces of work, photographs, certificates.

Achievements and Experiences

This can include community or voluntary work, evening classes, social clubs, sporting and leisure activities, foreign travel, hobbies and interests, etc.

Achievement in core skills can also be recorded, e.g. communication skills, problem solving, practical skills, personal skills, numeracy, information technology, foreign language competence.

Qualifications and Credits

Qualifications or certificates awarded can be listed. Where appropriate, the name of the awarding body, e.g. City and Guilds, and the level/result achieved can also be included.

Employment History

Employment details can be listed in order with the most recent job last.

Personal Statement

This can include an assessment of progress and identification of particular interests, strengths and aspirations. Any relevant information which has not been recorded in other sections can also be included here.

National Record of Achievement

Personal Details

Name _____

Title _____

Address _____

_____

Post Code

_____

Telephone No. _____

National Record of Achievement

Course Achievements

Title of course

Length of course

Date course started

Signature

Supported by

Date

Achievements & Experiences

Signature _____ Date _____

Supported by _____ Position _____

National Record of Achievement

Qualifications & Credits

Subjects/qualifications/credits & awarding body	Level/result	Date achieved

Signature _____ Date _____

Supported by _____ Position _____

Employment History

Job title and details	Employer & address

Signature _____ Date _____

National Record of Achievement

Personal Statement

Signature

Date

RECORDS OF ACHIEVEMENT FOR ADULT LEARNERS

An introduction for tutors

What is a record of achievement?

* A record of achievement (RoA) is a summary of an individual's achievements and experiences gained in education, employment and adult life.

* The National Record of Achievement (NRA), introduced by the Government in 1991, contains:

  personal details
  educational achievements
  other achievements and experiences
  qualifications and credits
  employment history
  personal statement.

What are the purposes of a record of achievement?

* To provide recognition of the individual's learning and achievements.

* To help in explaining the individual's achievements to others.

How is a record of achievement developed?

* By a systematic process of **recording achievement** which involves:

  * clarifying for students their learning programmes and objectives;

  * encouraging students to record their own learning and progress;

  * discussing with students their progress and achievements;

  * helping students to plan their learning and set personal learning targets;

  * encouraging students to collect and keep evidence of their achievements, e.g. certificates, photographs, pieces of work;

  * supporting and encouraging students in recognising and recording their achievements;

  * helping students to produce their records of achievement.

What are the purposes of recording achievement?

* To support students' learning.

* To increase students' motivation, self-confidence and self-esteem.

RECORDS OF ACHIEVEMENT FOR ADULT LEARNERS

An introduction for adult learners

What is a record of achievement?

* A record of achievement (RoA) is a summary of an individual's achievements and experiences gained in education, employment and adult life.

* The National Record of achievement (NRA), introduced by the Government in 1991, contains:

  personal details
  educational achievements
  other achievements and experiences
  qualifications and credits
  employment history
  personal statement.

What are the purposes of a record of achievement?

* To provide recognition of the individual's learning and achievements.

* To help in explaining the individual's achievements to others.

How is a record of achievement developed?

* By a systematic process of **recording achievement** which involves:

  * clarifying with tutors the content and learning objectives of the course;

  * discussing progress and achievements with tutors;

  * recording learning and progress;

  * planning learning and setting learning targets;

  * collecting and keeping evidence of achievements, e.g. certificates, photographs, pieces of work;

  * recognising and recording achievements;

  * producing a record of achievement.

What are the purposes of recording achievement?

* To support learning.

* For personal development.